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Fitzwater

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(54) **TRAY WITH CURVED BOTTOM SURFACE**

(75) Inventor: **Kelly R. Fitzwater**, Lakewood, CO (US)

(73) Assignee: **Graphic Packaging International, Inc.**, Atlanta, GA (US)

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H05B 6/64	(2006.01)
B65D 81/34	(2006.01)
B65D 5/30	(2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC ***H05B 6/6408*** (2013.01); ***H05B 6/6494*** (2013.01); ***B65D 81/3453*** (2013.01); ***B65D 5/302*** (2013.01); *B65D 2581/3406* (2013.01); *B65D 2581/3447* (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

USPC 206/557; 229/104, 903; 220/62, 62.1; 219/730, 104, 903

See application file for complete search history.

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Primary Examiner — Tu B Hoang

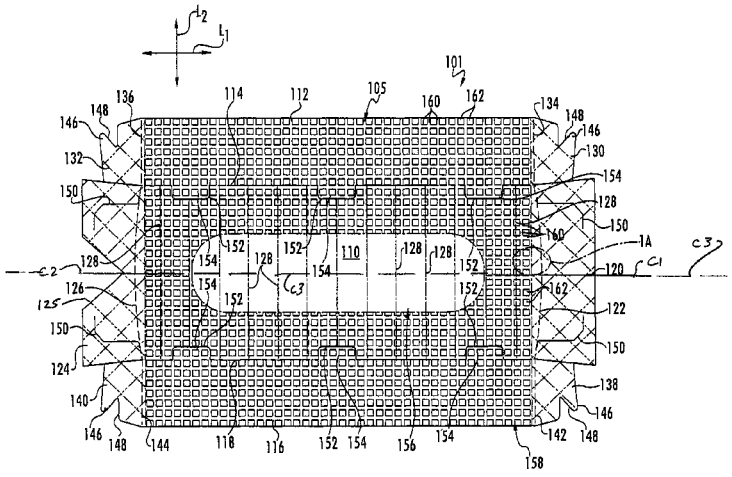
Assistant Examiner — Jimmy Chou

(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Womble Carlyle Sandridge & Rice, LLP

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A tray for holding a food product includes a plurality of panels extending around an interior of the tray. The plurality of panels includes at least a central panel, at least one side panel foldably connected to the central panel, and at least one end panel foldably connected to the central panel along an arcuate fold line. The central panel forms a curved bottom surface of the tray.

20 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets



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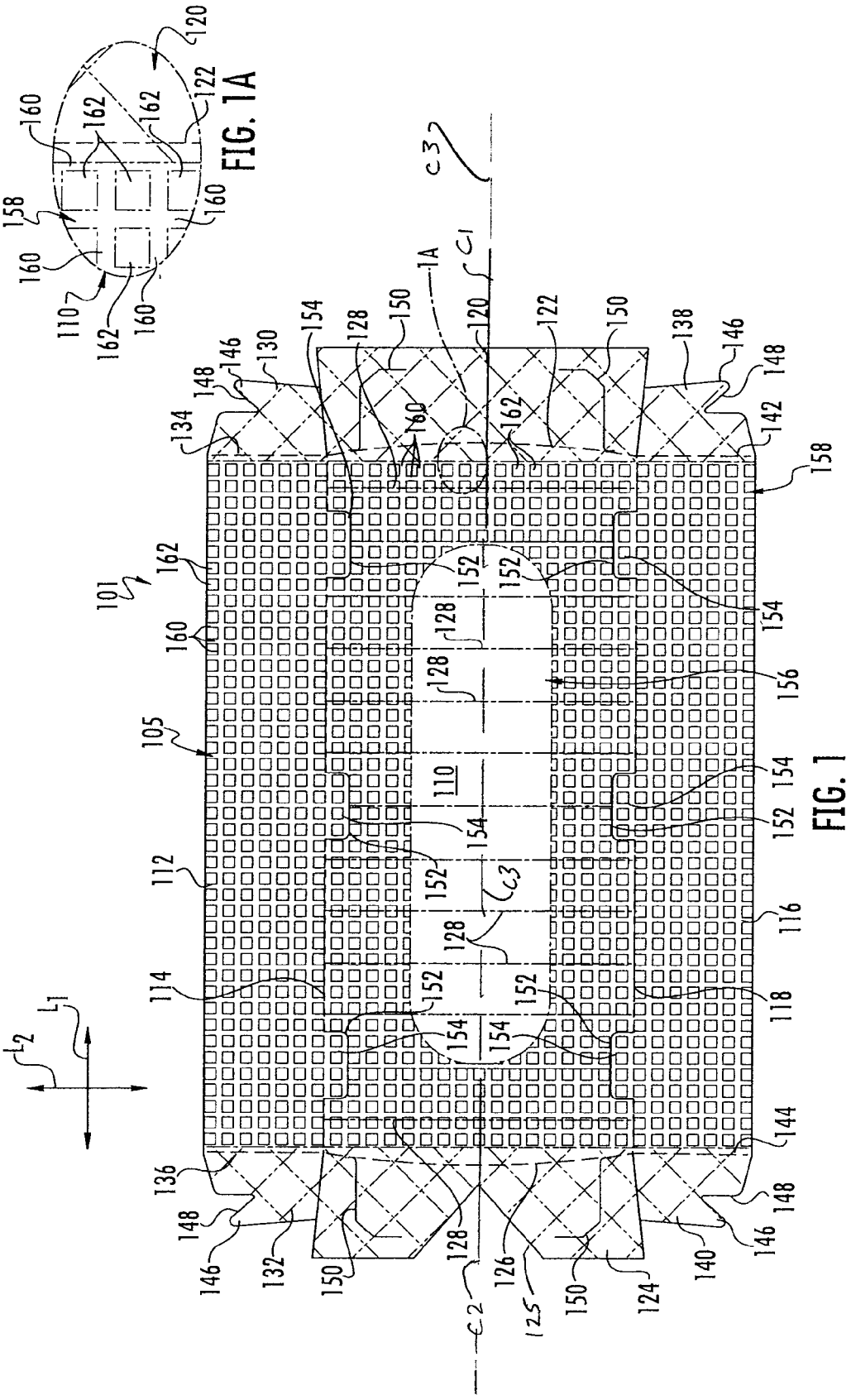
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C3
C1
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112
C3
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L1
L2
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C2
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FIG. 1A

FIG. 1

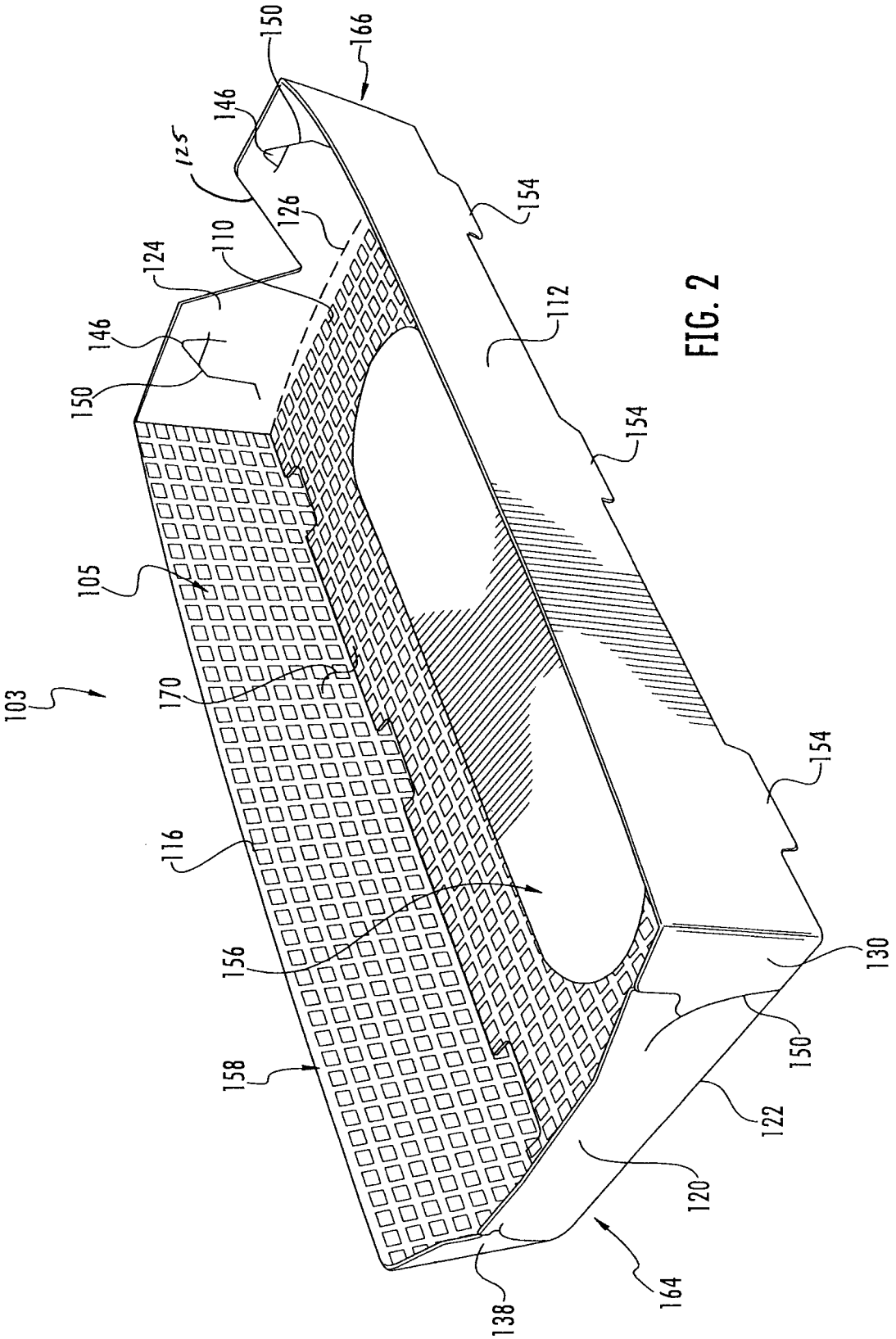
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FIG. 2

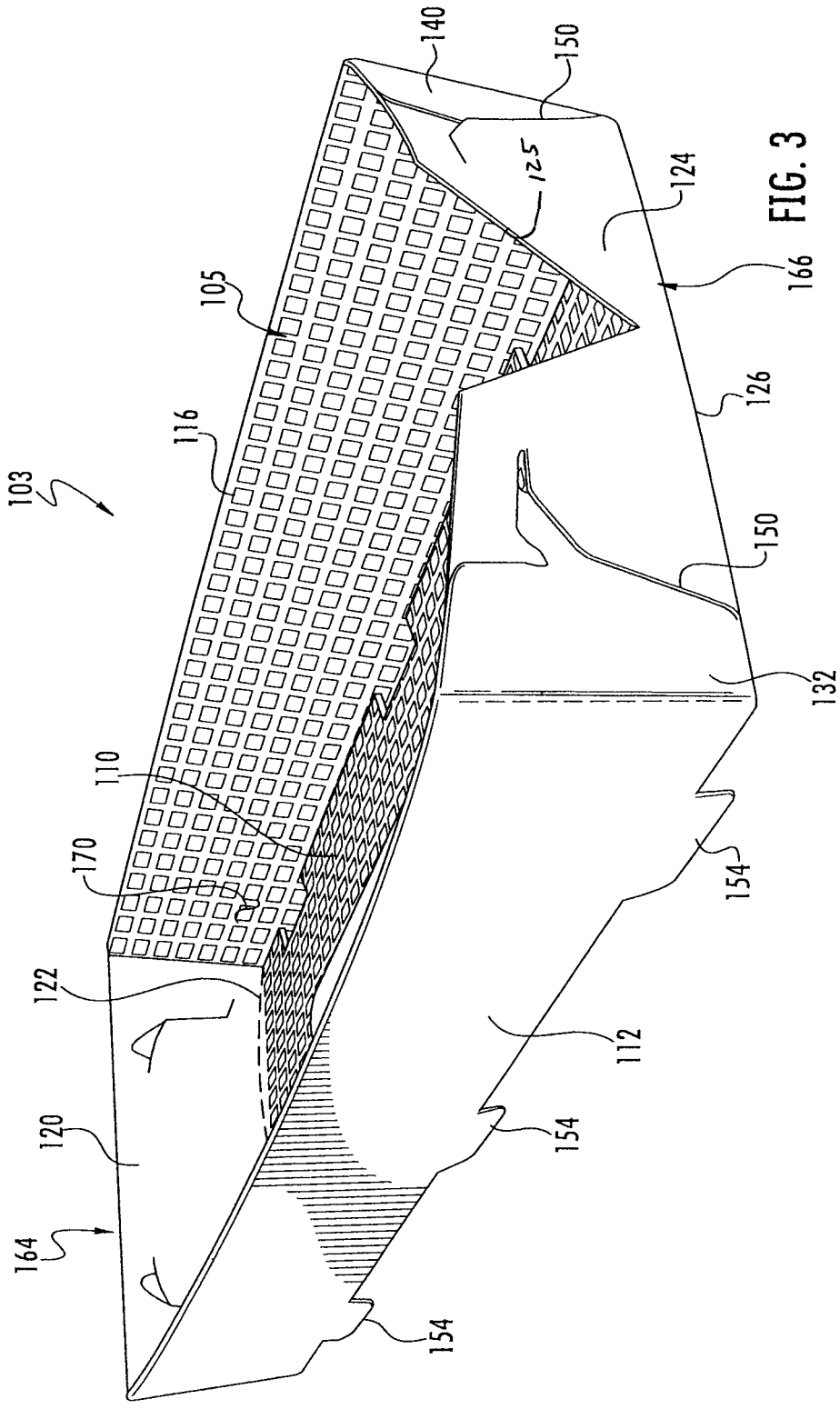
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FIG. 3

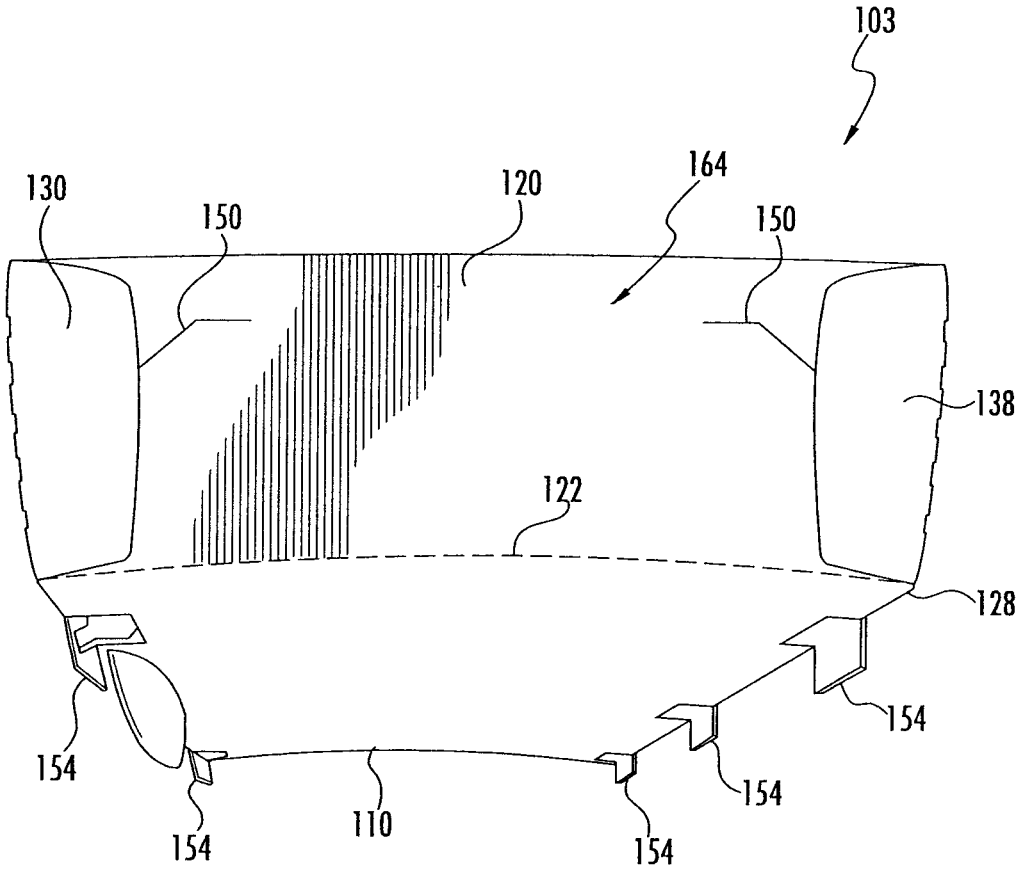

FIG. 4

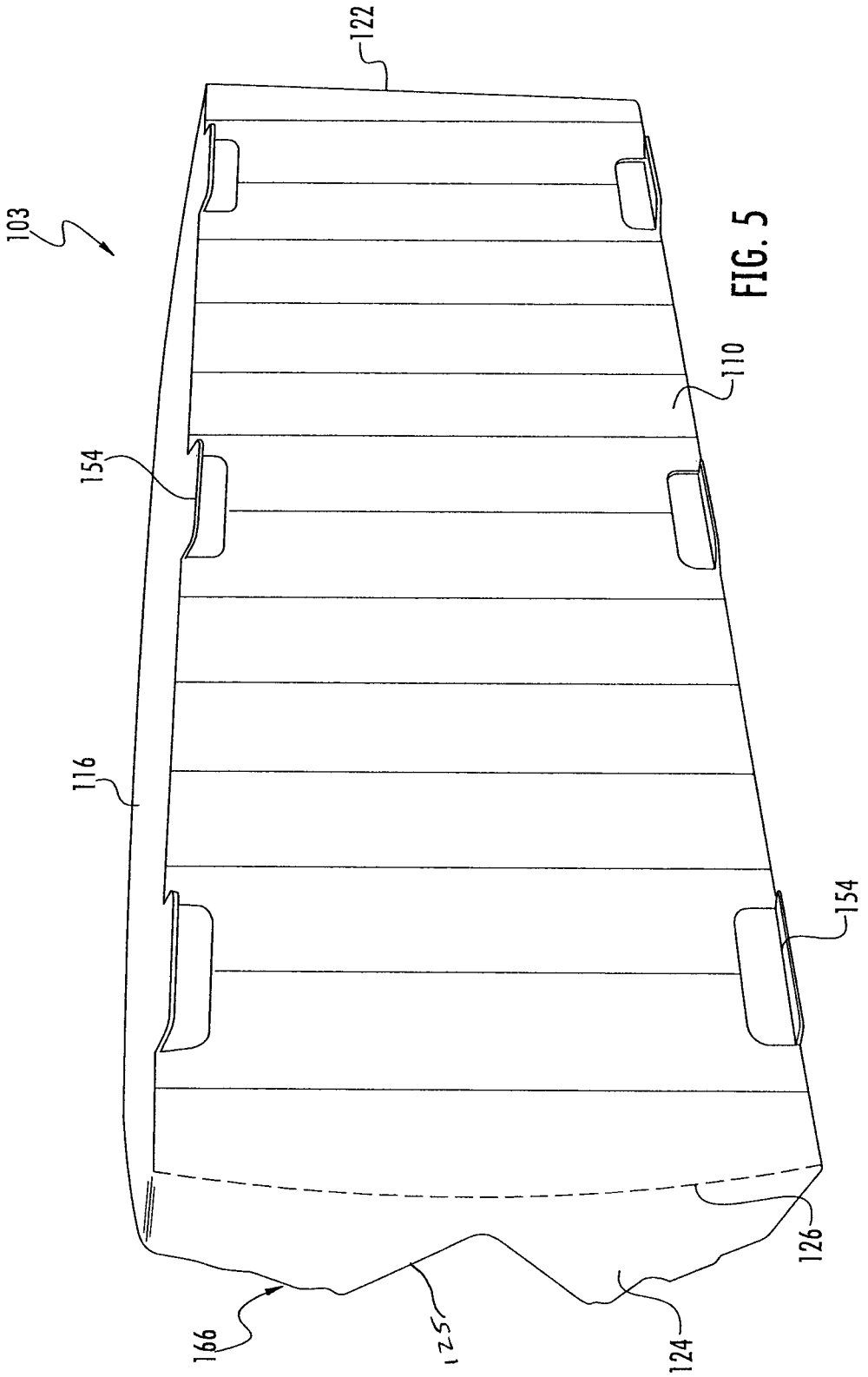

FIG. 5

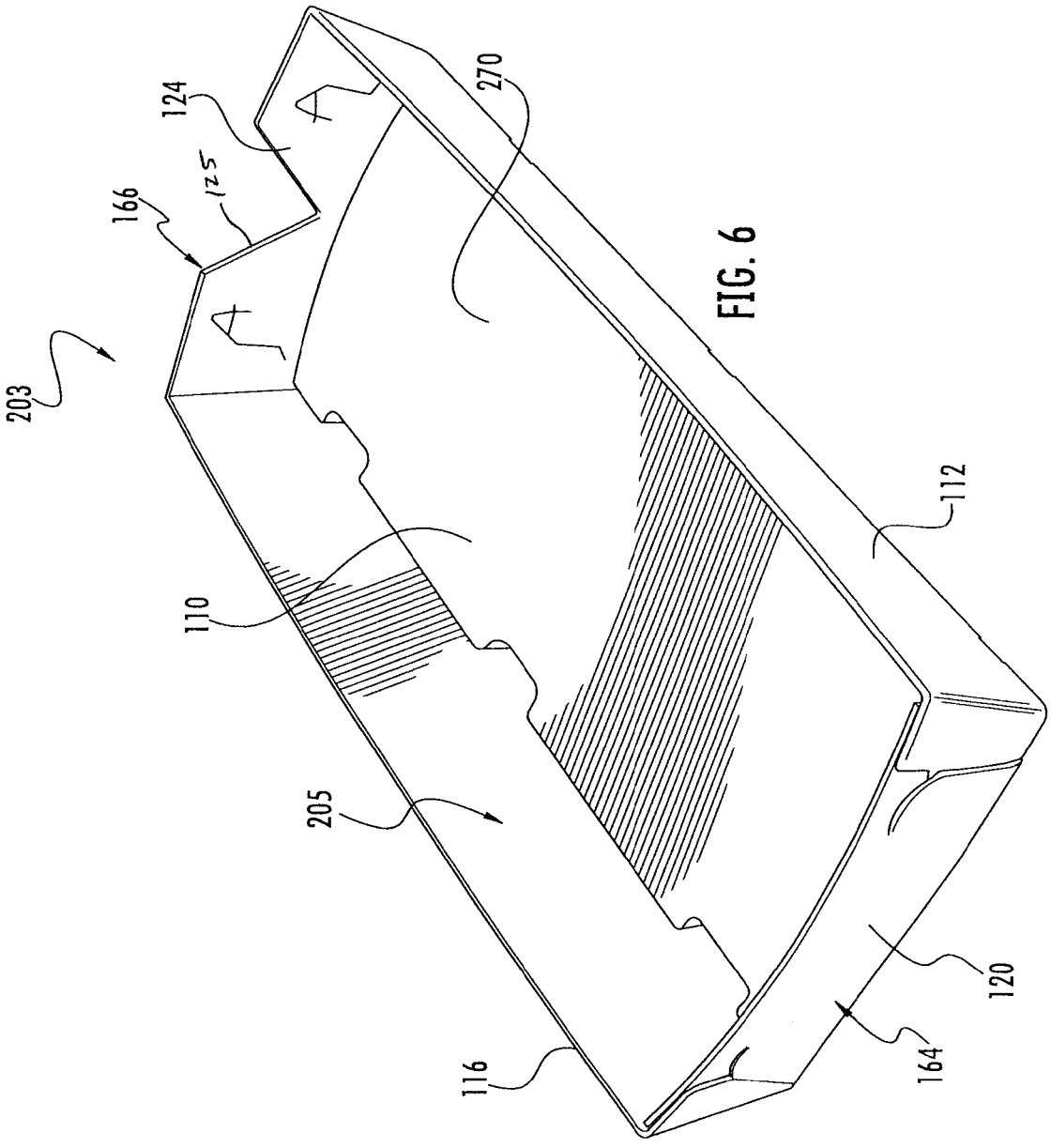

FIG. 6

TRAY WITH CURVED BOTTOM SURFACE

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 61/520,345, which was filed on Jun. 8, 2011.

INCORPORATION BY REFERENCE

U.S. Provisional Application No. 61/520,345, which was filed on Jun. 8, 2011, is hereby incorporated by reference for all purposes as if presented herein in its entirety.

BACKGROUND OF THE DISCLOSURE

The present disclosure generally relates to cartons or trays for holding and/or cooking food products or other types of articles. More specifically, the present disclosure relates to materials and constructs that may be used to prepare foods in a microwave oven.

SUMMARY OF THE DISCLOSURE

In general, one aspect of the disclosure is generally directed to a tray for holding a food product. The tray includes a plurality of panels extending around an interior of the tray. The plurality of panels includes at least a central panel, at least one side panel foldably connected to the central panel, and at least one end panel foldably connected to the bottom panel along an arcuate fold line. The central panel forms a curved bottom surface of the tray.

Another aspect of the disclosure is generally directed to a blank for forming a tray for holding a food product. The blank includes a plurality of panels configured to extend around an interior of a constructed tray. The plurality of panels includes at least a central panel, at least one side panel foldably connected to the central panel, and at least one end panel foldably connected to the bottom panel along an arcuate fold line. The central panel is configured to form a curved bottom surface of the tray.

Yet another aspect of the disclosure is generally directed to a method of forming a tray for holding a food product. The method includes obtaining a blank comprising a plurality of panels comprising at least a central panel, at least one side panel foldably connected to the central panel, and at least one end panel foldably connected to the central panel along an arcuate fold line. The method further includes forming at least a portion of an interior of the tray by folding the at least one side panel relative to the central panel, and forming a curved bottom surface of the tray by folding the at least one end panel relative to the central panel along the first arcuate fold line.

Those skilled in the art will appreciate the above stated advantages and other advantages and benefits of various additional embodiments reading the following detailed description of the embodiments with reference to the below-listed drawing figures.

According to common practice, the various features of the drawings discussed below are not necessarily drawn to scale. Dimensions of various features and elements in the drawings may be expanded or reduced to more clearly illustrate the embodiments of the disclosure.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. **1** is a plan view of a blank used to form an exemplary tray according to a first embodiment of the present disclosure.

FIG. **1**A is a detail view of a portion of the blank of FIG. **1**.

FIG. **2** is a first end perspective view of a tray formed from blank of FIG. **1**.

FIG. **3** is a second end perspective view of a tray formed from blank of FIG. **1**.

FIG. **4** is an end elevation view of a tray formed from blank of FIG. **1**.

FIG. **5** is a bottom perspective view of a tray formed from blank of FIG. **1**.

FIG. **6** is a perspective view of a tray according to a second embodiment of the disclosure.

Corresponding parts are designated by corresponding reference numbers throughout the drawings.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE EXEMPLARY EMBODIMENTS

The package of the present disclosure can be useful in containing a food product or other article such as any suitable type of food product that can be heated or cooked in a microwave oven. For example, the food product could include frozen food products or non-frozen food products. Some suitable food products could comprises a frozen pizza, a frozen French bread pizza, a frozen sandwich, frozen vegetables, popcorn, or any other suitable food product. Further, the package of the present disclosure can be used for heating, cooking, browning, crisping, etc. the food product by use of a heating or cooking device such as a microwave oven. It is understood that food products other than the food products listed herein may be contained in the package. Further, food products contained in this package may be generally rectangular, triangular, round, square, irregular, or any other shape. In this specification, the terms "lower," "bottom," "upper," and "top" indicate orientations determined in relation to fully erected and upright packages.

FIG. **1** is a plan view of a blank, generally indicated at **101**, used to form a package or tray **103** (FIGS. **3-5**) of an exemplary embodiment of the disclosure. The tray **103** is used to hold a food product (not shown), such as a French bread pizza, sandwich, calzone, turnover, burrito, or any other food product, during cooking of the food product. In one example, the tray **103** with a food product is placed in a microwave oven (not shown) to heat and/or cook the food product. At least a portion of the tray **103** may have an element for use in cooking, heating, browning, and/or shielding (e.g., a microwave energy interactive element **105** such as, but not limited to, a susceptor) mounted thereto. Alternatively, the microwave energy interactive element **105** can be omitted from the tray **103**.

The blank **101** has a longitudinal axis L**1** and a lateral axis L**2**. The blank **101** includes a central panel **110** foldably connected to a first side panel **112** at a first longitudinal fold line **114**. A second side panel **116** is foldably connected to the central panel **110** along a second longitudinal fold line **118**. A first end panel **120** is foldably connected to the central panel **110** at a first arcuate fold line **122** at one longitudinal end of the central panel **110**, and a second end panel **124** is foldably connected to the central panel **110** at a second arcuate fold line **126** at another longitudinal end of the central panel **110**. As shown in FIG. **1**, the central panel **110** can include a plurality (e.g., about 13) lateral fold lines or scores **128**. Only a representative few of the scores **128** are identified by their reference numbers in FIG. **1**. Alternatively, the lateral scores **128** can be omitted or otherwise configured, arranged, or positioned without departing from the scope of the disclosure. **14**.

In one embodiment, the first arcuate fold line **124** and the second arcuate fold line **126**, have a respective central axis C**1**, C**2** that lie along or are generally collinear with the radius of curvature of each of the arcuate fold lines. The respective central axis C**1**, C**2** of the first arcuate fold line **124** and the second arcuate fold line **126** can be aligned with or collinear with each other, and both respective central axis of the arcuate fold lines can be aligned with or collinear with a central axis C**3** of the blank **101** and/or tray **103** without departing from the disclosure. The first arcuate fold line **124** and second arcuate fold line **126** could be otherwise shaped, arranged, and/or configured without departing from the disclosure. For example the fold lines **124**, **126** could be otherwise arranged such that central axis C**1**, C**2** are not aligned with the central axis C**3** of the tray without departing from the disclosure.

In the illustrated embodiment, the blank **101** includes side end flaps **130**, **132** foldably connected to the first side panel **112** along respective lateral fold lines **134**, **136** at respective ends of the first side panel **112**. Side end flaps **138**, **140** are respectively foldably connected to the second side panel **116** along the respective lateral fold lines **142**, **144** at respective ends of the second side panel **116**. Each of the side end flaps **130**, **138**, **132**, **140** includes a locking feature, such as a projection **146** and a recess **148** for engaging a respective slit **150** in a respective end panel **120**, **124**. The side end flaps could be otherwise shaped, arranged, positioned, and/or configured without departing from the disclosure. For example, the locking features can be omitted from the side end flaps **130**, **132**, **138**, **140** and the end panels **120**, **124**, and the side end flaps **130**, **138**, **132**, **140** can be glued to the respective end panels **120**, **124**. Alternatively, the side end flaps **130**, **132**, **138**, **140** could be omitted from the blank **101** without departing from the disclosure.

In one embodiment, the end panel **124** includes a notch **125** located approximately in the center of the end panel, and the end panel **120** is free generally rectangular. In one embodiment, the notch **125** is generally V-shaped with the corner of the notch being aligned with the central axis C**3** of the blank **101**. The notch **125** can be for accessing a product held in the tray **103**. The notch **125** could be otherwise shaped, arranged, configured, and/or omitted without departing from the disclosure. Further the notch **125** could be replaced with a removable panel defined by a tear line for separating the removable panel from the end panel **124**. In such an alternative embodiment, access to a product in the tray **103** can be facilitated by removal of the removable panel.

As shown in FIG. **1**, each of the longitudinal fold lines **114**, **118** can be interrupted by three spaced-apart, generally curved or U-shaped cut lines **152** forming extensions **154** extending from the first and second side panels **112**, **116**. In the illustrated embodiment, the extensions **154** extend downwardly from the first and second side panels **112**, **116** below the central panel **110** to elevate the central panel **110** above a support surface (e.g., a table, a microwave oven floor, etc.). Alternatively, the curved cut lines **152** and the extensions **154** could be omitted or otherwise shaped, arranged, positioned, and/or configured without departing from the disclosure.

In the illustrated embodiment, the microwave interactive element **105** extends at least partially across the interior surface of the central panel **110** and the first and second side panels **112**, **126**. In one embodiment, the microwave interactive element **105** comprises a center portion **156** and a patterned portion **158**. The center portion **156** can be generally shaped as a rectangle with each end capped with a semicircle. Alternatively, the center portion **156** can comprise any suitable shape or can be omitted. As shown in FIG. **1**A, in detail, the patterned portion **158** can include several crossed longitudinal and lateral lines **160** forming an array of generally square portions **162** that are void of the microwave interactive element **105**. The microwave interactive element **105** could be omitted or otherwise shaped, arranged, positioned, and/or configured without departing from the disclosure. For example, the microwave interactive element **205**, shown in FIG. **6**, covers substantially all of the interior surface of the tray **203**.

The microwave interactive element **105** can be attached to the blank **101** by adhesive material (not shown) or by any other suitable mechanism. It is understood that the adhesive attaching the microwave interactive element **105** to the blank **101** may be a patterned layer of adhesive such as evenly spaced spots of adhesive or the adhesive could be otherwise applied without departing from the scope of this disclosure.

The material of the microwave interactive element **105** can be, or include, any type of known microwave interactive material, such as a susceptor that is for absorbing microwaves and/or converting microwaves into thermal energy to thereby become hot and to at least radiantly provide heat to food, a microwave energy shielding element that is for reflecting microwaves away from at least a portion of a food item, a microwave energy directing element for directing microwaves toward at least a portion of a food item, and various combinations of these and other features. In accordance with exemplary embodiments of the present disclosure, the material of the microwave interactive element **105** can more specifically be a microwave insulating material in contact with the food product for heating, browning, and/or crisping the food product during operation of the microwave oven. It is understood that the food product may be a type of food product that may or may not require browning or crisping during microwave heating without departing from the scope of this disclosure.

According to various aspects of the present disclosure, the material of the microwave interactive element **105** of the present disclosure could be any arrangement of layers, such as polymer (e.g., polyester) film layers, susceptor or "microwave interactive" layers, paper layers, continuous and discontinuous adhesive layers, and patterned adhesive layers, that provides an insulating effect. The material of the microwave interactive element **105** may include one or more susceptors, one or more expandable insulating cells, or a combination of susceptors and expandable insulating cells. Examples of materials that may be suitable, alone or in combination, include, but are not limited to, QWIKWAVE® brand susceptor, QWIKWAVE FOCUS® brand susceptor, MICRO-RITE® brand susceptor, MICROFLEX Q® brand susceptor, and QUILTWAVE® brand susceptor, each of which is commercially available from Graphic Packaging International, Inc. The material may be any suitable expandable cell material as desired, and, in some instances, may include any of the materials described herein, any of the materials described in International Publication No. WO 03/066435, published Aug. 14, 2003, which is entirely incorporated by reference herein, or any combination thereof. Alternatively and as should be apparent from the foregoing, as one example the microwave interactive element **105** can consist essentially solely of a susceptor.

Alternatively or additionally, any of the blanks, packages, or other constructs of the present disclosure may be coated or laminated with other materials to impart other properties, such as absorbency, repellency, opacity, color, printability, stiffness, or cushioning. For example, absorbent susceptors are described in U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2006/0049190, published Mar. 9, 2006, which is incorporated

herein by reference in its entirety. Additionally, the blanks or other constructs may include graphics or indicia printed thereon.

The microwave interactive element **105** can include other materials than described herein and may be otherwise arranged, configured, and/or designed without departing from the scope of the disclosure. Further, multiple layers of microwave interactive element **105** can be used in the tray **103**. Alternatively, the microwave interactive element can be omitted without departing from the scope of the disclosure.

In alternative embodiments, the blank **101** could be otherwise shaped, arranged, and/or configured.

As shown in FIG. **2** and described in the following in accordance with one acceptable example, the tray **103** is formed from the blank **101** by upwardly folding the side panels **112**, **116** along the respective longitudinal fold lines **114**, **118** and folding the end panels **120**, **124** along the respective arcuate fold lines **122**, **126**. Folding the side panels **112**, **116** upwardly causes the extensions **154** to separate from the central panel **110** along the curved cut lines **152** and extend downwardly to elevate the central panel **110**. Accordingly, the extensions **154** can act as legs that help separate the central panel **110** from a support surface such as a table top or counter. Folding the end panels **120**, **124** along the arcuate fold lines **122**, **126** can cause the central panel **110** to curve or arch upwardly, conforming to the curve of the arcuate fold lines **122**, **126**. Thus, the curvature of the central panel **110** is defined by the arcuate fold lines **122**, **126**. Accordingly, the central panel **110** arches or extends into an interior **170** of the tray **103**. For example, a medial portion of the central panel **110** extends into the interior **170** of the tray **103** such that the medial portion of the central panel is closer to the top of the tray than distal portions of the central panel that are near or closely adjacent the side panels **112**, **116**. Each of the side end flaps **130**, **138** can be folded along the respective lateral fold lines **134**, **142** into face-to-face contact with the exterior surface of the first end panel **120** and inserted into the respective slit **150** so that the projections **146** and recesses **148** engage the respective slits **150**. Accordingly, the first end panel **120** and the side end flaps **130**, **138** form a first closed end **164** of the tray **103**. Similarly, a second closed end **166** of the tray **103** is formed by folding the side end flaps **132**, **140** along the respective lateral fold lines **136**, **144** into face-to-face contact with the exterior surface of the second end panel **124** and inserting the side end flaps **132**, **140** into the respective slit **150** so that the projections **146** and recesses **148** engage the respective slits **150**. Alternatively, the side end flaps **130**, **138**, **132**, **140** can be folded into face-to-face contact with the interior surface of the respective end panels **120**, **124**. As shown in FIGS. **2** and **3**, the arched central panel **110**, the side panels **112**, **110**, and the closed ends **164**, **166** form the interior **170** of the tray **103**. Alternative assembling, loading, and closing steps may be used without departing from the scope of the disclosure. For example, the side end flaps **130**, **138**, **132**, **140** can be glued into face-to-face contact with the respective end panels **120**, **124** in addition, or alternatively, to interlocking the side end flaps to the end panels via the projections **146** and the slits **150**.

In the illustrated embodiment, the arched central panel **110** forms a convex or curved bottom surface of the tray **103** that supports a food product. The arched central panel **110** can help provide better contact between the microwave interactive element **105** and a food product (not shown) in the tray than a flat bottom panel. Improved contact between a food product and the microwave interactive element **105** can help improve the cooking performance of the tray **103**. Additionally, or alternatively, the arched central panel **110** can help provide better support for the food product than a flat bottom panel. For example, where a flat bottom panel might sag or bow downwardly toward a support surface (e.g., a floor of a microwave oven) under the weight of a food product, the arched central panel resists sagging to help maintain separation from the support surface.

In an alternative embodiment (not shown), the extensions **154** can be omitted so that the longitudinal fold lines **114**, **118** rest on the support surface and at least a portion of the arched central panel **110** arches away from the support surface.

FIG. **6** illustrates a tray **203** according to a second embodiment of the disclosure. The second embodiment is generally similar to the first embodiment, except for variations noted and variations that will be apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art. Accordingly, similar or identical features of the embodiments have been given like or similar reference numbers. As shown in FIG. **6**, the tray **203** includes an interior **270** formed by the arched central panel **110**, the side panels **112**, **116**, and the closed ends **164**, **166**. A microwave interactive element **205** covers substantially all of the interior surface of the central panel **110**, the side panels **112**, **116**, and the closed ends **164**, **166**. As with the previous embodiments, the interior **270** of the tray **203** has a convex or curved bottom surface formed by the arched central panel **110**.

In general, any blank as described above may be constructed from paperboard having a caliper so that it is heavier and more rigid than ordinary paper. The blank can also be constructed of other materials, such as cardboard, or any other material having properties suitable for enabling the carton to function at least generally as described above. The blank can be coated with, for example, a clay coating. The clay coating may then be printed over with product, advertising, and other information or images. The blank may then be coated with a varnish to protect information printed on the blanks. The blank may also be coated with, for example, a moisture barrier layer, on either or both sides of the blanks. The blank can also be laminated to or coated with one or more sheet-like materials at selected panels or panel sections.

In accordance with the exemplary embodiments, a fold line can be any substantially linear, although not necessarily straight, form of weakening that facilitates folding thereabout. More specifically, but not for the purpose of narrowing the scope of the present disclosure, fold lines include: a score line, such as lines formed with a blunt scoring knife, or the like, which creates a crushed or depressed portion in the material along the desired line of weakness; a cut that extends partially into a material along the desired line of weakness, and/or a series of cuts that extend partially into and/or completely through the material along the desired line of weakness; and various combinations of these features. In situations where cutting is used to create a fold line, typically the cutting will not be overly extensive in a manner that might cause a reasonable user to incorrectly consider the fold line to be a tear line.

The above embodiments may be described as having one or more panels adhered together by glue during erection of the carton embodiments. The term "glue" is intended to encompass all manner of adhesives commonly used to secure carton panels in place.

The foregoing description of the disclosure illustrates and describes various exemplary embodiments. Various additions, modifications, changes, etc., could be made to the exemplary embodiments without departing from the spirit and scope of the disclosure. It is intended that all matter contained in the above description or shown in the accompanying drawings shall be interpreted as illustrative and not in a limiting sense. Additionally, the disclosure shows and

describes only selected embodiments of the disclosure, but the disclosure is capable of use in various other combinations, modifications, and environments and is capable of changes or modifications within the scope of the inventive concept as expressed herein, commensurate with the above teachings, and/or within the skill or knowledge of the relevant art. Furthermore, certain features and characteristics of each embodiment may be selectively interchanged and applied to other illustrated and non-illustrated embodiments of the disclosure.

What is claimed is:

1. A tray for holding a food product, the tray comprising:

a plurality of panels extending around an interior of the tray, the plurality of panels comprising a longitudinal central panel, a first side panel foldably connected to the central panel at a first longitudinal fold line, a second side panel foldably connected to the central panel at a second longitudinal fold line, a first end panel foldably connected to the central panel along a first arcuate fold line, and a second end panel foldably connected to the central panel along a second arcuate fold line, wherein the central panel forms a curved bottom surface of the tray and the central panel includes a plurality of reinforcement lateral fold lines extending from the first longitudinal fold line to the second longitudinal fold line, the plurality of reinforcement lateral fold lines are equally spaced across the length of the central panel in the same direction with the first and the second longitudinal fold lines to reinforce and strengthen the central panel, and

the second end panel comprises a notch arranged therethrough configured to allow access to one end of a food product.

2. The tray of claim **1**, wherein curvature of the curved bottom surface is defined by at least one of the first and second arcuate fold lines.

3. The tray of claim **2**, wherein the curved bottom surface includes a portion of the central panel extending into an interior of the tray.

4. The tray of claim **1**, wherein the curved bottom surface is arranged to support a food product.

5. The tray of claim **1**, further comprising:

at least one extension extending from at least one of the first side panel and the second side panel, the at least one extension is configured to elevate the central panel.

6. The tray of claim **5**, wherein the at least one extension is defined by a curved cut-line cut through the central panel.

7. The tray of claim **1**, wherein the first and second side panels comprise respective locking flaps configured to engage the first and second end panels to form the tray.

8. The tray of claim **1**, wherein curvature of the curved bottom surface is defined by the first and second arcuate fold lines.

9. The tray of claim **1**, further comprising:

a plurality of extensions extending from the first and second side panels configured to elevate the central panel.

10. The tray of claim **9**, wherein the plurality of extensions are defined by curved cut-lines cut through the central panel.

11. The tray of claim **1**, wherein a central axis of the second arcuate fold line is collinear with a central axis of the first arcuate fold line.

12. The tray of claim **1**, further comprising:

an interactive element arranged on the central panel.

13. The tray of claim **12**, wherein the interactive element is a radio-opaque element configured to interact with a microwave oven.

14. The tray of **12**, wherein the interactive element comprises a metallic inlay.

15. The tray of **14**, wherein the metallic inlay comprises a grid of interlocking metallic traces.

16. The tray of claim **15**, wherein the metallic inlay further comprises an oblong central interactive element.

17. The tray of claim **16**, wherein the oblong central interactive element is arranged to contact a major surface of a food product.

18. The tray of claim **1**, further comprising:

an interactive element arranged on at least one of the central panel, the at least one side panel, and the at least one end panel.

19. The tray of claim **1**, wherein the plurality of reinforcement lateral fold lines extends between the first side panel and the second side panel.

20. The tray of claim **1**, wherein the plurality of reinforcement lateral fold lines comprise at least three lateral fold lines.

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